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South Bend Tribune

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Boaters beware: Despite heavy snows, Great Lakes likely to stay low through summer

By ERIC SHARP
Knight Ridder Newspapers

Despite the huge snowfalls of December, Great Lakes boaters can expect water levels to be low through the summer and perhaps even drop some more.

"Based on the information we have right now, we're predicting this spring will have average to slightly higher than average rainfall," said Adam Fox, research scientist for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. "But we're still hearing stories from the northern regions where local ponds and rivers are very low, and we know that lakes Superior, Michigan and Huron are still low."

The Corps of Engineers says that lakes Erie and Ontario are about the same or a few inches lower, and Huron and Michigan are close to 2000 levels. Lake Superior is about 6 inches lower than last spring.

The problem is that after this month, which in the northern Great Lakes brings snow melt in addition to rain, water levels tend to drop rather than rise. The amount of water entering the lakes is less than the amount of water that evaporates from them.

Lakes Erie and Ontario have benefited from unusual weather patterns in which enormous amounts of snow dropped all winter long from weather systems that roared through the Ohio River Valley.

The storms tracked farther south than normal, and the effect on Superior and the Michigan-Huron system has hydrologists worried.

"There is moderate amounts of snow around Lake Superior, but most of the basins around the upper lakes didn't get a whole lot of snow after December," Fox said. "The concern is that what they did get may not be enough to offset the losses from last year,

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and that could combine with heavy evaporation next fall to send water levels even lower."

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